

Time and again, this contractor, profiting from our Government, profiting from this administration, didn't provide the basic protection it promised to its own employees.

I believe it is time for this Congress to open this door, to lift this lid and look inside, about the security contractors who are at work in Iraq today at the expense of our Government. We need to know how many are working. We need to know what rules they operate by. We need to know what incidents they have been involved in. America is held accountable for their conduct. Even though they may be private sector employees, for every Iraqi, I am sure they look at them as symbolizing and representing the United States of America.

It is our responsibility to ask the hard questions about these security contractors, what they are doing, and whether anything improper has occurred. The Iraqi Government has reached this conclusion and asked them to leave. I will be surprised at the end of the day if they do leave. They are so closely connected to the highest levels of this administration, it is hard to imagine they will actually leave the country even after the Iraqi Government has called publicly for that to happen.

So I have asked the leadership on the Democratic side to look into the security contractor arrangements, as well as the Blackwater USA company in particular, to get down to the bottom line and the basic question as to whether these people who are involved in this conduct have done things that really don't advance the cause of peace and stability in Iraq. That is a legitimate question which should be asked of every contractor involved in business in Iraq.

We know for the last 5 years on Capitol Hill hard questions were not asked. There was little or no oversight by this Congress asking whether our taxpayers' dollars were being well spent, whether the right decisions were being made. Sadly, we find ourselves mired in a war that has cost us almost 3,800 American lives, with more than 30,000 injured, with no end in sight. It has been a colossal foreign policy mistake—one that we will pay for for generations.

Despite the heroism of our men and women in uniform day-in and day-out, policymakers in Washington have let them down. This President made an appeal to the American people the other night to allow him to stay the course until he can leave office. To think that 130,000 soldiers will still be in Iraq next year is really unacceptable. We have pushed our military to the absolute limit. I have been there. I have talked to them. I have met with their families. I have talked to the support groups back home. I have visited the veterans hospitals. I have seen these soldiers on the battlefield as well as back home, and they have paid a heavy price for this war. The President sug-

gests that we just keep 130,000 troops there indefinitely until he finds what he can define as success, but that isn't good enough. We have to make sure we are sensitive to these soldiers and the toll that is being taken on them personally.

I am sorry to report that the divorce rates among American enlisted personnel now are twice what they are normally, and among officers three times. The suicide rate is the highest it has been since Vietnam and, unfortunately, those who are subject to multiple deployments come back and face many needs for health care and counseling. That is the reality. We are now paying the highest cash incentives ever in our history for people to enlist and to reenlist. Mr. President, \$10,000 is common. If a 19-year-old soldier will agree to show up in 6 weeks or so, they double it to \$20,000 in cash—to someone fresh out of high school. We have changed a lot of rules of eligibility for service in our military. Unfortunately, we are pushing them to the absolute limit. That is part of the reality of where we are today in Iraq. It is a reality which the President did not address when he spoke to the American people last week.

This event yesterday, where Blackwater was expelled by Iraq's Government, should be a wake-up call to this administration and this Congress to provide the kind of meaningful oversight of these private security operations, to ask whether these men and women who were under our employ, as employees of our Government through private contractors, have stood up and done the right thing for our Nation. Many have, but those who have not have to be held accountable.

Mr. President, SPC Darryl Dent died in Iraq on August 26, 2003, when an IED exploded under his humvee. Specialist Dent—21 years old—had hoped to go to medical school one day. He was the first National Guard member from his hometown to die in combat since Vietnam.

LCpl Greg MacDonald died in Iraq on June 25, 2003, when his humvee rolled as he and six other marines raced to rescue American soldiers caught in an ambush. Lance Corporal MacDonald—29 years old—had a master's degree and hoped to make a career in foreign affairs and help create peace in the Middle East.

MAJ Kevin Shea, a veteran of the first gulf war, was killed by rocket fire in Al Anbar province on September 14, 2004—his 38th birthday. He was promoted posthumously to lieutenant colonel, making him the highest-ranking marine killed in the war in Iraq at that time.

Army Reserve LTC Paul Kimbrough was a lawyer who once worked for a Member of the House of Representatives and even ran unsuccessfully for a House seat himself. He was in Afghanistan, overseeing improvements to living conditions for our soldiers at Bagram Air Base, when he suffered a

fatal heart attack on October 3, 2003. He was 44 years old.

CAPT Darrell Lewis grew up in a tough housing project, earned a scholarship to a private high school and another scholarship to college. He graduated, joined the Army and rose quickly through the ranks. Three months ago, on June 23, he died in Vashir City, Afghanistan, when his unit was attacked by insurgents using RPGs, mortars and small arms fire. Captain Lewis was 31 years old.

What did these five fallen warriors all have in common, besides their devotion to duty and to our Nation? A hometown. At the time of their deaths, all five were residents of the District of Columbia. They died trying to bring democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq, but they did not have the legal right to participate fully in our American democracy. That is wrong. This week, we have an opportunity to right this wrong.

This week, for the first time in nearly 30 years, the U.S. Senate will take up a bill to grant the citizens of the District of Columbia, our Nation's Capital, a voting member—one voting representative—in the U.S. House of Representatives. I am one of the cosponsors of the bipartisan District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007.

Our aim is to not to strengthen the hand of either political party, but to strengthen American democracy. For that reason, the DC House Voting Rights Act would also create an additional House seat for the State of Utah.

DC VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, a little later this morning, we are going to face an important debate on the DC House Voting Rights Act. It is one that I support. It is a cause that I have supported for a long time. It is unimaginable that nearly 600,000 Americans have no voice and no vote in Congress today. But it is a fact. It reflects decisions made long ago about whether the District of Columbia and its residents would be represented in Congress. There is good reason why they should be.

I was saddened to learn this morning that President Bush has threatened to veto this bill. He will ask men and women in the District of Columbia to fight and risk their lives so the people of Iraq and Afghanistan have a right to vote, but he has threatened to veto the bill which gives those same soldiers the right to vote for congressional representation of their own. That is unacceptable.

The President says he has constitutional concerns. He and other opponents of the DC House Voting Rights Act point to language in the Constitution that says that the House of Representatives will be composed of members chosen by "the people of the several states." They argue that the District of Columbia is a district, not a State.

It is a weak argument at best. Our Federal judiciary has long treated the District of Columbia as a "State" for many purposes. For example, the 16th amendment of the Constitution grants Congress the power to tax our incomes, "without apportionment among the several states." The 16th amendment has been interpreted to apply to DC residents; the Federal Government can and does require residents of Washington, DC, to pay Federal income taxes.

DC residents are also required to serve on Federal juries and register for selective service. Why should the right to vote be any different?

I think when we look at this basic purpose, the right to vote for congressional representation, the people who live in Washington, DC, deserve it.

Do opponents of DC voting rights believe that residents of America's Capital City should bear the full responsibilities of citizens but do not deserve the full rights of citizens?

It is not just Democrats who believe the DC voting bill is constitutional. Several prominent Republicans, including Kenneth Starr, Jack Kemp, and Viet Dinh, principal author of the PATRIOT Act, have testified that the bill meets constitutional muster.

Yesterday, September 17, marked the 220th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution. This is a time to celebrate the genius of the Framers who had the vision and insight—in the year 1789—to lay the foundation for what has become the world's oldest democracy.

The Constitution our Framers gave us was a brilliant document—but not a flawless one. It denied full participation in our democracy to the people of Washington.

Over the past two centuries, we have refined the Constitution to expand the right to vote to all Americans. We have expanded freedom. Some expansions of voting rights have come as a result of constitutional amendment. In other cases, Congress has expanded the right to vote by statute.

Just last year, this Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act, which another, courageous Congress first passed in 1965. The Voting Rights Act is often considered the most important civil rights law ever passed by Congress. It removed poll taxes and dismantled Jim Crow.

A few weeks ago, on September 5, the Senate Judiciary Committee—on which I serve—held a hearing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. One of the witnesses at that hearing was a hero of mine and a giant of our civil rights movement: Representative JOHN LEWIS of Georgia.

Representative LEWIS testified about discrimination against African Americans when he was growing up in Alabama. He talked about the inspiration he drew from meeting Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. He talked about how far we have come as a nation when it comes to the treatment of

African Americans and persons of color. And he talked about the progress we have made when it comes to voting rights.

JOHN LEWIS was nearly beaten to death on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL, marching for voting rights in 1965. He put his life on the line for the right to vote. So I think we should take special note of what JOHN LEWIS had to say when he was asked at the Judiciary Committee hearing about the bill that would create voting rights for the residents right here in Washington, DC.

JOHN LEWIS said the following:

[We are going to say to the District of Columbia, where people leave this district, leave this city, they go and fight in our wars, and then they cannot participate in the democratic process. That is wrong.

The Senate can heed those words this week. The Senate can give the residents of Washington, DC, a voice in Congress.

For two centuries, Washington, DC, residents have fought and died in this Nation's wars, often suffering among the highest casualty rates.

Twenty-three Washington, DC, residents have been killed or wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Haven't the residents of this city earned the right to have their voices heard, and their vote count, in the House of Representatives? Haven't the people of Washington, DC, waited long enough?

Washington, DC, is the only capital city in the world whose citizens do not have voting representation in their national legislature.

For over 200 years, Washingtonians have been mere spectators to our great democracy.

In the course of our Nation's history, we have many times expanded freedom and expanded voting rights to people whom our Founders, in their incomplete genius, left out.

This week, we have an opportunity, and an obligation, to take another important and long overdue step forward in the historic struggle for voting rights by giving the residents of the District of Columbia a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. Let us vote for the right to vote.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TESTER). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF 1999

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to the consideration of H.R. 1124, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1124) to extend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I rise to speak in support of H.R. 1124 and the opportunity it provides for DC's college-bound students. The reauthorization of the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 would continue a successful and effective scholarship program.

The DC tuition assistance grant program, or DCTAG, provides scholarships to cover the difference between in-State and out-of-State tuition for eligible DC residents attending any public college or university in the country. DCTAG awards those recipients up to \$10,000 annually and \$50,000 total in tuition assistance.

The original purpose of the bill was to address concern that college-bound students in the District were at a disadvantage because DC lacks a State university system. DCTAG expanded higher education opportunities by allowing students to attend public universities and colleges nationwide at in-State tuition rates.

The original bill also allows students to attend a limited number of non-profit private schools to receive scholarships of up to \$2500 annually and \$12,500 total. Students who attend any historically black college or university or any private school in the District, Maryland, or Virginia qualify for private school grants. The 2002 reauthorization clarified that the grants were only for U.S. citizens residing in DC.

The success of the program is clear. Since the launch of DCTAG in 2000, participation among DC residents more than doubled from 1,900 recipients to 4,700 recipients. DCTAG has awarded 26,000 grants totaling over \$141 million to 9,769 District students. I am pleased to say that a few of those grants went to students attending the University of Hawaii at Manoa in my home State.

Not only are more students receiving grants; more are going to college. The college enrollment rate for DC public school students has doubled to 60 percent and 38 percent of students in the program are the first ones in their family to attend college. DCTAG affords many District residents a chance to go to college when they otherwise would not be able to afford it.

In July, my Subcommittee on the District of Columbia held a hearing with the Mayor and his education leadership team on their reform proposal for the public school system. They offered a realistic picture of DC public schools and a realistic vision for accountability and reform.

The Chancellor of Education, Michelle Rhee, and the Mayor are working very hard to improve the unacceptably low performance of DC students by recruiting talented teachers, reforming the administrative offices, and repairing crumbling schools. They deserve all the support that the Congress can provide in their efforts.